

## Goals for FY 2024

### Goal One: Resource Stewardship

Prioritize research-based educational programming and interdisciplinary collaboration to promote the responsible stewardship and sustainable practices of Fort Bend County's natural resources for both new and established landowners, and across various sectors and industry partnerships.

### Goal Two: Youth Development

Enhance the programming and resources available to schools and families both of which are necessary to broaden concepts in agriculture, natural sciences, human nutrition, and community health for the next generation of Fort Bend County citizens and leaders.

### Goal Three: Community Sustainability

Encourage innovation, deliver science-based preventive health programming, and provide the operational support necessary to sustain an environment of readiness, preparedness, opportunity, protection, and resiliency in Fort Bend County cities and communities.

### Goal Four: Economic Strength

Enhance the efficiency, profitability, and resiliency of agriculture, natural resources, food systems, and local economies in Fort Bend County, the state of Texas, and around the world.

### Goal Five: Healthy Living

Provide innovative service and educational programming to apply, coordinate, and integrate scientific evidence at the intersection of nutrition, human health, and agriculture.

## Program Spotlight: Vegetable Conference

Brandy Lorraine Karen



L to R: Staff members welcome guests; Kitzman gives welcome message; Texas Dept of Ag info booth

The 39th Annual Vegetable Conference covered topics of Bees & Honey Production, Marketing Produce, Climate/Drought & Irrigation, Introduction to Permaculture, and Mushroom Gardening, along with CEU sessions for licensed pesticide applicators. Every Fort Bend County Extension area was represented with informational booths along with other vendors.

Below: A panoramic view of the attendees at the Vegetable Conference on Feb. 8, 2024



This Quarter  
by the Numbers:

5,985

Contacts in 1-to-1 meetings

3,284

Educational Program Participants

126

Educational Sessions

6,855

Educational Contact Hours

44 Promotional Events

reaching 17,208 people

9,592

NEWSLETTER CONTACTS

Numbers from AgriLife TAMED reporting system  
12/1/23 - 2/29/24 as of March 15, 2024

## Our Team

### Helping Texans Thrive

#### Administration

**Dr. Amy Ressler**, County Extension Director  
**Cheryl Wasicek**, Administrative Manager  
**Doug Staff**, Technical Assistant  
**Karen Santos**, Sr. Administrative Assistant  
**Norma Diaz**, Office Assistant

#### 4-H Youth Development

**Danielle McLure**, County Extension Agent - 4-H Youth Development  
**Dr. Willa Williams**, County Extension Agent - Urban Youth Development  
**Jose Cavazos**, PVAMU Extension Agent - 4-H Youth Development  
**Jennifer Evanicky**, Administrative Assistant  
**Kally Felcman**, Livestock Coordinator - Youth & Adult

#### Agriculture & Natural Resources/ Horticulture

**John Few**, County Extension Agent - Agriculture & Natural Resources  
**Dr. Abdul Hakeem**, PVAMU Extension Agent - Agriculture & Natural Resources  
**Boone Holladay**, County Extension Agent - Horticulture  
**Brandy Rader**, Program Coordinator - Master Gardeners/Master Naturalists  
**Lorraine Niemeyer**, Administrative Assistant

#### Family & Community Health

**Leticia Hardy**, County Extension Agent - Family & Community Health  
**Nisa Khan**, County Extension Agent - Family & Community Health  
**Erica Knighton**, PVAMU Extension Agent - Family & Community Health  
**Celeste Feast**, Extension Agent - Better Living for Texans  
**Sujata Jhangiani**, Extension Assistant - Expanded Food & Nutrition Education  
**Vacant**, PVAMU Nutrition Education Associate - Expanded Food & Nutrition  
**Victoria Zwahr**, Program Coordinator - Family & Community Health

#### Community & Economic Development

**Janelle Johnson**, PVAMU Extension Agent - Community & Economic Development



# AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES/HORTICULTURE

Goals One & Four

On Feb. 8, at the Fort Bend County Fairgrounds, the 39th Annual Vegetable Conference provided **educational topics for small scale vegetable producers**. **CEUs** for pesticide applicator licensing were offered in Laws & Regulations and Integrated Pest Management. State Representative **Stan Kitman** gave opening comments, and Fort Bend **County Judge KP George** visited during a break. Every Fort Bend County Extension staff member helped in some way, and many volunteers made the event successful.

- **303** Total Attendance: 237 registrants (37% increase over 2023) from 21 counties
- **32** exhibitors; **10** special guests; **8** speakers
- **415** CEUs granted for **85** people (who could earn up to 5 CEUs each)

Vegetable Team Volunteers



Above: FBCMGA Vegetable Team and the last bounty delivered to a local food pantry.

The **Fort Bend County Master Gardener Association (FBCMGA)** is dedicated to education *and* outreach. **Produce** harvested from demonstration gardens is **donated to local food pantries**. The Association set a goal to grow and donate 2000 lbs. of fresh vegetables in 2023. Just before the holidays, the Vegetable Garden Team delivered the last donation of the year bringing their total to **1,870.75 lbs. of fresh produce** (valued at \$2,571.01). Additionally, Fort Bend County Master Gardener Food Drives throughout the year brought in **924.25 lbs. of food** (valued at \$1,056.99), bringing the grand total of Fresh Produce and Food Drive items collected and delivered in 2023 to **2,795.00 lbs. of food (roughly valued at \$3,627.99)**.

**FBCMGA** Fruit Tree Fundraiser **sale** was held on Feb. 10. Over **1,300 trees** were sold to more than **600 customers**. More than 100 Master Gardener Volunteers were present to interact and educate customers on their Fruit Tree selections.

The **2024 Grow Your Own** series kicked off the first class on Jan. 20 on the topic of **Fruit Trees**. Total registration was 225, **91** attended in person, and 200 viewed online. The second class on Feb. 17 on the topic of **Creating Healthy Garden Soil** drew 250 registrants with **73** in person, and 50 views online as of yet.

The **2024 Landscape Success** series, offered online only on the fourth Friday each month, kicked off with "**Landscape Basics**" on Feb. 23 with 300 registered, **95** participating virtually in real time, and 50 viewings afterward on YouTube so far.

The **Costal Prairie Master Naturalist Chapter** hosted several successful outreach events this quarter. Monthly nature walks focusing on specific areas of interest such as birding, entomology, and plant identification reached over **180** people in Jan. and Feb. Most events are open to the public. The chapter has also worked with youth groups like the Girl Scouts and Montessori schools to educate youth on nature conservation.

Right: Master Naturalists and guests pose for a pic after the February Insect Hike



Left: Danny Wilson, Founder of Farm Dirt Compost in Houston, hosted participants in the Advanced Compost training for a close-up look on Dec 7.



Fort Bend County AgriLife Extension hosted the **Texas Advanced Master Gardener - Compost Training**, Dec. 6-8, 2023. Twenty-four (**24**) Certified Extension Master Gardeners from **17** counties participated, taking deep dives into the topic of compost to receive certification. These Master Gardeners were very enthusiastic with great ideas about making a difference in their communities. The training consisted of presentations from Extension Specialists, Extension Master Gardeners, and Nursery & Farm Managers. Participants enjoyed field trips and hands-on compost activities.

PVAMU-Agriculture Agent, Abdul Hakeem, hosted an **Agribusiness Planning** workshop on Jan. 24 covering *An Overview of Agricultural Appraisal and Guidelines to Qualify for Ag Evaluations using 'Wildlife Management' and 'Beekeeping'* with **40** people attending. A **Forest Workshop** was held on Feb. 13 with **14** people, promoting urban forestry where more than **300** trees were distributed free of cost. And, a **Pollinator Gardens Workshop** was held on Feb. 20 as a joint workshop with Fort Bend County Master Gardeners. The purpose of this workshop was to educate general public about the importance of pollinators and which plants should be planted to provide pollen and nectar. There were 51 registered, **9** attended in person, and **19** people attended online.



Above: guest speaker, Nathan Hermond, from Prairie View A&M Extension, presenting "Imagine Life Without Pollinators!"

# 4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

## Goal Two

Fort Bend staff members Willa Williams, Jose Cavazos, and Janelle Johnson along with two Coastal Prairie (Ft Bend) Master Naturalists assisted Harris County Horticulture Agent Brandi Keller with 45-minute **"Bat Chat"** presentations about the benefits and habitats of bats. Over **1,000** youth at Hubnek Elem participated in the educational sessions. Brandi, who made the connection through the Houston Bat Team with Texas Parks and Wildlife, said *"It was crazy, but also fun. Because... Bats are batastic!"*



"Bat Chat" at Hubnek Elementary on Jan. 23

Above: the presentation team

Below: a session with lots of enthusiastic questions



Above: PVAMU Extension 4-H Agent, **Jose Cavazos**, recruits potential 4-H members at the **Move Fort Bend Forward Youth Leadership** event on Jan. 10.

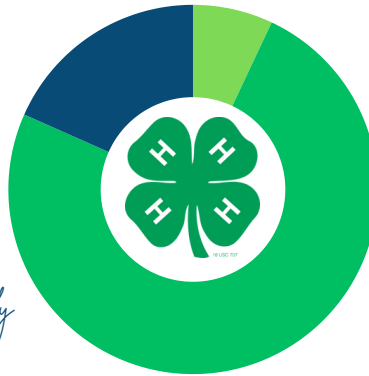


Above: Livestock Coordinator **Kally Felcman** poses with 4-H member **Brooke Hydo** and her heifer "First Lady" at the **San Angelo Stock Show** on Feb. 11.



Above: **Brazos Bend 4-H Club** at the AgRobotics contest **San Antonio Livestock Show** where they were tasked with building and programming an autonomous robot to performs tasks in a veterinary office.

- 34 Clover Kids (Grades K-2)
- 362 Club Members (Grades 3-12)
- 89 Adult Volunteers (Registered)



Fort Bend County  
4-H Total Enrollment Number **485**  
as of February 15, 2024

**Spring time is Stock Show season** for many 4-H families. Major shows in the spring include youth livestock exhibitions as well as competitive contests such as Livestock Judging, Dairy Judging, Food Challenge and AgRobotics.

### Fort Worth Stock Show

- Jan 18 to Feb 3
- Livestock Exhibitors: **10**

### San Angelo Stock Show

- Feb 7 to Feb 15
- Livestock exhibitors: **8**

### San Antonio Livestock Show

- Feb 7 to Feb 23
- Livestock Exhibitors: **7**
- Contest Participants: **19**

The Fort Bend County **4-H Parent Advisory Board (PAB)** met on Jan. 29 at 6:30 pm. There were **10** leaders representing 9 4-H clubs. The group is comprised of dedicated 4-H leaders who gather to provide advice and direction to the 4-H club program including events such as County Roundup, 4-H Awards Banquet, and Fundraisers that support local clubs and activities. The 4-H PAB is led by

- **Tricia Kaminsky**, President
- **Trista Korczynski**, Vice-President
- **Veena Pena**, Treasurer
- **Veronica Crum**, Secretary

While the adults met, **5** youth attended the **4-H County Council** meeting learning leadership skills and exploring strategies to increase youth involvement throughout the County.



Left: 4-H clubs host annual **Pecan Sales** as a **Fundraiser** to support County programming efforts and recognition events. There might be some left if you are interested in buying. Jen is ready to help!

4-H agent Danielle Prihoda-McLure taught a **Public Speaking Workshop** for youth on Feb. 24. **Five** 4-H members worked through the process of developing and presenting a formal speech. The experience prepared them to participate in 4-H Public Speaking and Education Presentation contests.



Above: 4-H members, **Sarah Schimmer**, **Henry Schimmer**, and **Zoe Pena** posed with 4-H Agent **Danielle Prihoda-McLure** after the Public Speaking Workshop.

# FAMILY & COMMUNITY HEALTH

Goals Three & Five

PVAMU-FCH Agent Erica Knighton showcased Extension work at Austin H.S. and New St. Philip's Baptist Church Health Fairs and Mission Bend-Glen Elem. Science Night with co-workers. She taught **"Taste of African Heritage,"** a 6-lesson series to **40** participants total at the Sugar Land Branch Library, Mamie George Community Center, and Rosenberg Civic Center. She demonstrated recipes with a team at the **Women in Ag Conference** on the PVAMU campus on Feb. 23 featuring Bitter Melon Salsa and Malabar with Smoked Turkey.



Above: Erica Knighton at Mission Bend-Glen Science Night



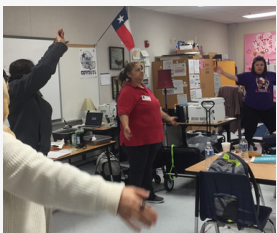
Above: Victoria and Sujata ready to answer questions.

**"Fort Bend Has Heart"** and so does the Extension Family and Community Health Unit. At the Feb 15 Fort Bend County Health Fair, Victoria Zwahr shared info about Walk Across Texas, and Sujata Jhangiani promoted the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP).

**Better Living For Texans** Extension Agent Celeste Feast began **"A Fresh Start to a Healthier You"** series of 4 classes teaching nutrition basics at the Landmark Community Center, UT Physicians, and Jones Creek Ranch Park Community Center which will be completed in March.



Above: Participants at Jones Creek ready for "A Fresh Start"



Extension Assistant, Sujata Jhangiani, teaches in English and Spanish to low-income families with children. In December she wrapped up **"Healthy Bites, Healthy Moves,"** a series of 8 classes at Fort Bend Hope with **8 graduates** ("graduates" are people who attend all 8 classes). She also has series in progress with Holley Elementary and George Family Development Center scheduled to complete in March. *Healthy Bites, Healthy Moves* teaches people how to incorporate good nutrition and physical activity in creating a healthy lifestyle for themselves and their families.

Left: Parents at Holley Elem learn about Healthy Bites, Healthy Moves

**Leticia Hardy** hosted workshops with youth during the holiday break: **"Holiday Master Class"** on Dec. 19 with **5** kids and **"Santa's Workshop"** Dec. 20 with **6** kids. They learned to make holiday crafts and healthy snacks. Agent Hardy also taught classes for the **Senior Medicare Patrol (SMP)** program for older adults. She presented **Fall Prevention** with **5** participants at Fort Bend Gardens on Dec. 11 and **Identity Fraud Prevention** at UT Physicians with **8** attendees on Feb. 8.

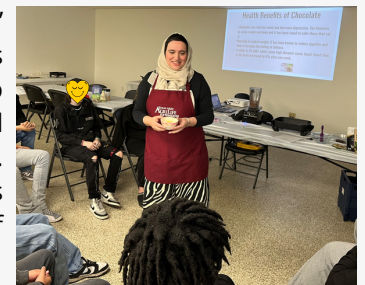


Above: handmade soap activity during holiday workshop

Below: Carol Gaas (left) and Jackie Milton (right) share their experiences as FCH volunteers on Dec. 7.



Nisa Khan hosted a **"Fueled by Chocolate"** workshop along with Agent Hardy for GED students on Feb. 14. The **12** students were introduced to chocolate as a fruit, shown new culinary skills, and got to taste chocolates from around the world. They learned about chemistry of the body's reaction to eating a miracle berry, the anatomy of tongue, and the connection of sugar to the brain.



An active advisory committee supporting the overall FCH program is the **Family and Consumer Sciences Program Area Committee (FCS-PAC)** led by **Gena Walls** as chair and **Carol Gaas** as treasurer. They hosted a **volunteer appreciation luncheon** on Dec. 7 with **21** attending including special guest representatives from State Senator Kolkhorst's office and US Senator Cruz's office. They had a "regular" meeting on Jan. 3.

**Advisory committees** are vital to Extension work. Agents rely on committees for input and guidance for the best possible programming outcomes. As a new FCH agent, Nisa Khan hosted her first **Chronic Disease Prevention committee** meeting on Feb 20. **Seven** members attended including 3 physicians, 1 personal trainer/body builder, 2 nutritionists, and 1 teacher.



Above: Chronic Disease Prevention Advisory Committee

# COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Goal Three

PVAMU - Extension Agent - Community & Economic Development, Janelle Johnson, is building a program from the ground up as the first of its kind in Fort Bend. Janelle earned her **certification as a Freddie Mac CreditSmart Facilitator** on Jan. 11 after completing 10 weeks of training and passing a test. She and Erica Knighton presented the **Junior Achievement Academy** at Brazos Bend Elementary School teaching Financial Literacy, Entrepreneurship, and Work Readiness skills during the 5-week program with **22 students**. She is the local point of contact for the Houston Furniture Bank - Stafford Location, managing **300 vouchers** for the **Furniture Assistance Program** that provides essential furniture to low-income families and individuals impacted by natural disasters, domestic violence, poverty, and mental health challenges. The program integrates financial literacy and homeownership education as vital components of essential skills for sustainable living.



Janelle Erica

**TEAMWORK** makes the dream work!



4-H member Gloria Stephens shares information about 4-H.



Janelle Johnson and John Few are ready to talk about programs.



Willa Williams tells interested parents about the 4-H Program.



Master Naturalists and Brandy Rader provide information for Judge George.

The Extension office hosted an **Open House** on Monday, Jan 29, with a come and go format between 10:30 am (right after a Master Naturalist meeting) and 6:30 pm (just before a 4-H Parent Advisory Board meeting). During the day, **61 guests** signed in, including Fort Bend County Judge KP George and County Treasurer Bill Rickert. Extension program areas had informational exhibits with staff on hand to answer questions. Volunteers from Master Naturalists, Master Gardeners, and a 4-H member shared about their work. Visitors could play "Extension Lingo Bingo" for a chance to win a door prize.



"Taste it Tuesday" at the office is a time for staff to gather informally while trying new foods and learning new things. On Feb. 20 Nisa Khan shared green coffee and dates with a display of traditional Ramadan decorations to share about the tradition.

An Extension crew went to the Landmark Community Center to meet and eat at Commissioner Prestage's holiday luncheon, Dec. 8.

Welcome to the "New Kid on the Block," Norma Diaz, who joined the staff on Feb. 5 as our part-time office assistant.



**More Vegetable Conference pictures!**  
Above: group photo to commemorate the day  
Left: Staff visit with Representative Kitzman  
Right: Vegetarian food options provided



State Representative Stan Kitzman

# Staff Spotlights

## Fort Bend County:



**Doug Staff** a.k.a “Do-it-all Doug” In 18 years as Technical Assistant, he has worked closely with the Master Gardeners & Master Naturalists, handled livestock tagging for the county fair and major livestock shows, and assisted with Ag, 4-H and FCH programs. But, he mostly enjoys assisting the great folks of Fort Bend with their agriculture & horticulture questions.

When not at work, it is practically a guarantee he is on the coast near salt water. Doug has been married to Mary, his college sweetheart, for 24 years, and they are raising 3 amazing kiddos.

## Prairie View A&M Extension:



**Dr. Abdul Hakeem** earned his masters and PhD degrees from the University of Tennessee and has been with PVAMU Extension since 2022. He has worked with Texas A&M University System since 2013 and conducted numerous studies on cotton pest management. He is a recipient of the prestigious Fulbright scholarship and Netherlands Fellowship Program. He has published 13 peer reviewed publications with 164 citations and has received numerous academic awards.

Currently, he is a Co-PI on several NIFA projects with a total funding of \$2.9 million. His interests are to help underserved producers and provide various avenues to boost agriculture productivity.

## Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service:



**Leticia Hardy** earned her bachelors degree in Family & Community Services and masters in Marriage & Family Therapy, both from Prairie View A&M University. Her Extension career has spanned 17 years of service with both PVAMU and AgriLife. Leticia describes herself as a rare combination of expertise, passion, and compassion in her work as an FCH Agent providing guidance on parenting, car seat safety, nutrition, and financial management with enthusiasm and a genuine desire to make a difference in people's lives.

Best Wishes go out to **Krystal Wilcox** who received her degree in May of 2023 and left Prairie View A&M Cooperative Extension EFNEP at the end of February to pursue a career in teaching!



*“Everybody can be great. Because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve.... You don't have to know the second theory of thermodynamics in physics to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love.”*  
~Martin Luther King, Jr.



## Commissioner Connection:

County Commissioner, Precinct 2, **Grady Prestage** met with the Extension staff during the monthly total staff office conference on Feb 16. He shared words of wisdom and encouragement. As a strong supporter of Extension work, he challenged the staff to look toward the future of our rapidly changing county for innovative ways to adapt. *“Although Extension work may look different in a county our size, the work you do continues to be vitally important,”* he said.

## Coming up IN THE NEXT QUARTER:

- **Through the end of May** - Texas Community Futures Forum (TCFF) long range strategic planning meetings will be held to help answer the question: **“What are the most important issues facing Fort Bend County in the next 3 - 5 years?”**
- **Walk Across Texas - March 11- May 5** - Fort Bend County **WAT!** Event ~teams of up to 8 ~ 8 weeks ~ 832 miles~ Sign up at [www.HowdyHealth.tamu.edu](http://www.HowdyHealth.tamu.edu).
- **Landowner Management Series**, 6pm, at the Extension Office, 1402 Band Road in Rosenberg
  - Tues., April 16: **Farm Financials**
  - Wed., May 1: **Introduction to Poultry**
  - Wed., May 29: **Fish Pond & Aquatic Weed**



Use this QR code to share your input for Fort Bend County TCFF

## We love our Volunteers:

Volunteers are the lifeblood of Extension work! The Fort Bend County Master Gardeners **Youth Advisory Committee**, known as YAC, is an amazing group dedicated to growing great kids. They meet monthly to plan and report on educational efforts including their school programs, scouting badge workshops and an annual Earth Kind Kids Camp with learning opportunities

## Closing Thought:



For more information:  
**Dr. Amy Ressler**  
County Extension Director  
Fort Bend County  
281.342.3034  
[amy.ressler@ag.tamu.edu](mailto:amy.ressler@ag.tamu.edu)